



# Saltseller

Newsletter of Salt of the Earth supporting SCAD in India

Patron: JEREMY IRONS

SALT OF THE EARTH (Registered Charity 328328)

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## from the editor

Reading through this edition it seems to me that progress would be a one word way of describing it. Progress to £3 million pounds raised which if you had predicted this back in 1989 I would have had hysterics and questioned your sanity. Understandably we lead on this story.

The progress made in the villages has been remarkable and the SCAD Village "Volunteer" has been a major influence here. We feature this important job along with a an inspiring case study of a remarkable Volunteer woman on page 2 and 3.

As always there is lots to report on concerning the programmes we support (pages 4 and 5). There have been improvements to the Elders programme, more water generation progress, the Gypsy school has had structural and syllabus improvements and a new young women's self help groups scheme has been launched. We also report on page 7 details on a new environmental project on the SCAD campus which combines energy generation and soil fertility.

Elsewhere Kim Roberts writes about her recent visit to SCAD and we advertise our second SCAD tour scheduled for January 2013 - the first one is a sell out.

Finally there is an article on the issues and challenges that face the Indian Government if conditions for the rural poor are to be improved.

Murray Frankland

## STOP PRESS

We have just heard from SCAD that the winter monsoon has started and that early indications are that it will be a good widespread one. This is excellent news.

# We pass the £3 million mark

Some time in the summer we achieved the sum of £3 million pounds raised since the charity started in September 1989. It seems only yesterday that we raised £2 million pounds and I'm only just getting over that! By any measure this is a magnificent performance for an all volunteer charity and one that we can all be very proud of.

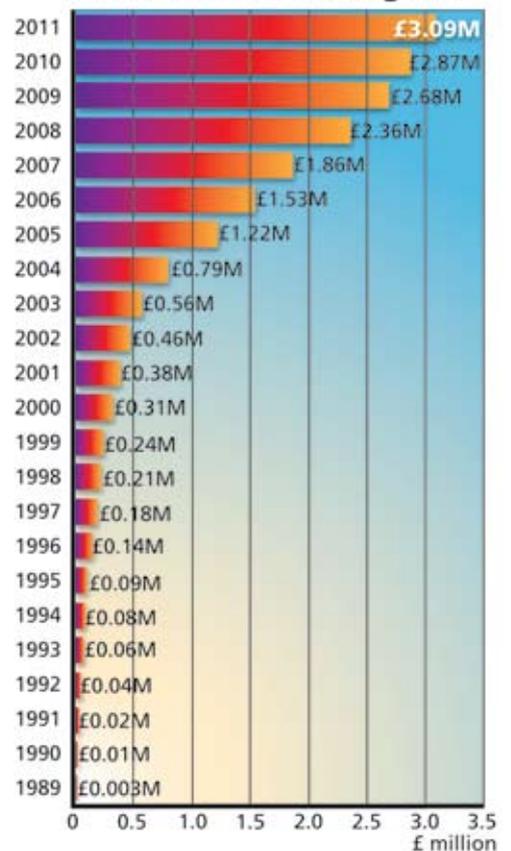
You will see from the diagram how we have got there. Our income improved markedly from 2001 onwards due to the launch of our child sponsorship scheme and was boosted even more by the tsunami appeal in early 2005 which raised £190,000 to add to a successful grant application to CAFOD for £208,000 over two years. This appeal also introduced us to several hundred new people many of whom have become regular supporters. We have been fortunate enough to receive a number of significant one off donations of £100,000 or more from individual supporters since then and the level of regular donations has held up extremely well despite the recent financial uncertainties.

***This charity is so fortunate to have such a generous and committed bunch of supporters.***

The importance of our long term and committed relationship with SCAD cannot be underestimated. We have always been by far the biggest overseas supporter of SCAD and our long term commitment has enabled them to move from strength to strength. This is what SCAD founder and Chairman Cletus Babu said for a press release to mark our achievement.

***"The ongoing commitment of Salt of the Earth to our work over the years has been of paramount importance to us. Knowing that Salt of the Earth was behind us providing core funding has given us the confidence and courage to expand and develop our programmes for the rural poor. They have***

SOTE income - running total



***been and continue to be our biggest funders and on behalf of all of us at SCAD, I would like to express our sincere thanks and deep gratitude."***

The importance of our contribution to SCAD will continue and I and the rest of the Trustees will do our best to maintain and hopefully increase our funding of SCAD. If the past is anything to go by then we will be successful because we have such a great group of supporters.

On behalf of SCAD and the rural poor communities they serve, thank you all so very much.

Murray Frankland FOUNDING AND MANAGING TRUSTEE

# The role of the v

*The village Volunteer provides the vital bridge between the SCAD full time team and the community it serves. They are literally SCAD's eyes and ears and it is they who see to it that the SCAD programmes are delivered on the ground. Volunteers from the villages where SCAD works are carefully recruited and trained by SCAD.*

*By using a local person to carry out the first line development duties in their village SCAD has tapped into a highly efficient and cost effective way of delivering service.*

The Volunteers are paid very little ( less than £10 per month ) but are very well supported and trained by the SCAD full time staff. The Volunteers clearly relish the job that they do and this is borne out by an extremely low turnover rate, some of them have over twenty years of service. Their official hours are ten hours per week but most of them do very much more than this and are glad to do so. They are overwhelmingly female although there are four male village Volunteers.

The Volunteers are supported and managed by full time SCAD "Animators". Each Animator is a qualified field social worker and is responsible for up to ten villages. He or she in turn reports to a SCAD Block Leader. The Village Volunteer will be visited by her Animator at least once a week. There are monthly Block meetings of Volunteers as well as regular special training and updating sessions.

The Volunteers have been hugely important to the success of the Women's Self Help Groups of which there are now over 550. They have proved very successful in promoting the idea to their sisters and helping the initial formation of the groups. Thereafter their job is to see to it that

the group meetings take place and organise any training programmes that are required. They also inform and educate the groups about SCAD services and what, if any, services are available from the state and central governments.

They have played a great part in the huge reductions of children dropping out from primary schooling. When SCAD started work with a new village it was not unusual for less than 50% of the children to complete primary school education and a significant number never even attended. Now the completion rate of primary schooling in their SCAD villages is over 95% and every child has received at least some schooling. They achieve this by getting close to parents whose children are coming up to primary school age to convince them of the importance of schooling for their children, especially girls. They are also quick to notice any significant school absences and visit the child's home to investigate the reasons.

Many Volunteers help out at their state village primary schools as teaching assistants. The staffing levels can be as high as 50 children per teacher in these schools and the extra

## CASE STUDY

Mrs Thalami Irulammal, a resident of Athanoor, was recruited by SCAD five years ago to be the SCAD Volunteer in her village. With the help of a comprehensive training programme and ongoing support from SCAD field staff she has been highly instrumental in improving the life in her village. Through this process she has gained in stature and is highly regarded in her village and beyond.

She lives with her husband, daughter and son -in-law and four grand children. She has been particularly keen on promoting SCAD schemes for tree planting and kitchen gardens and has been very active in getting Government welfare schemes implemented in the village.



# Village Volunteer

Right:  
Thalami taking care of  
her backyard poultry



help and support that Volunteers can give means a great deal. They are also active in organising Parent Teachers Association where possible. Such groups are mutually beneficial to all concerned. Volunteers also encourage parents to allow their children to go to secondary schools. Now around 50% of children start secondary education where it used to be only a handful.

Where villages receive the services of the Community Based Rehabilitation Scheme (CBR) Volunteers have an important role to play. They act as the link between the families of the children with physical and learning difficulties and the CBR team members and they help organise treatments and camps where necessary. Likewise where there are older people in their

villages who are on the Elders programme it is the job of the Volunteer to see to it that the WSHG members take day to day care of the elders and to arrange for transportation for the old people to go to the monthly day centre.

All this to do in ten hours a week! It is a tall order indeed and it is no wonder that many of them do far more than this every week of the year. This is acknowledged by SCAD as it looks at ways to improve delivery of services to the villages. One of the ideas is to formally increase the number of hours worked as well as the possibility of full time employment for some of the Volunteers in the bigger villages. Many of the Volunteers would like to see this happen so that they can help their fellow villagers even more.

The village Volunteer is the day to day face of SCAD in the villages and they play such a fundamental and important part in the development of that community. They are highly motivated, energetic, well trained and are dedicated to the improvement of conditions in their village. They are splendid people.

Left:  
Thalami Irulammal  
take Charge as President

In addition to her normal SCAD volunteer duties she is a member of the Sakhalin Women's Self Help group for differently abled women. She proudly says that she is able to work effectively for the differently abled villagers as she is one herself. To this end she has organised a special SCAD CBR ( Community Based Rehabilitation ) camp in her village.

With her increased confidence and popularity coupled with the boost she got from attending a SCAD women's empowerment programme, she decided to contest the local village Panchayat election this October. Not only did she get elected but she was also made President of the Panchayat, with a five year term of office.

The Panchayat is responsible for the self governing of the village and is the lowest tier of a district and block level system. The Panchayat is responsible for many aspects of village life such as water provision, education and other facilities and has a budget from state and national government. She now has a very responsible job on top of her normal SCAD volunteer duties and she is relishing the opportunity to be an even greater force for progress in her village.

Her attitude and overall approach was admirably summed up in an interview she had with her SCAD Development Officer straight after her election. This is what she said...

“My public life started when I joined SCAD as volunteer for my village and people now recognise me as a public worker now. I am very well known by the villagers now because of the volunteer job and SCAD has been very supportive in helping me to become the President of this village. I am always for the welfare of the poor and marginal village people. This victory has made me very happy and it is a chance once again to serve the village and the village people. Today (October 25th) is great day in my life as I take charge as President. It is a great chance for me to start many more welfare activities and I am very grateful to SCAD. It was the SCAD volunteer job and the training I got that has given me the motivation and skills to work for the welfare of my villagers.”

# Project news

## Women's Self Help Groups (WSHG)

Training sessions go on apace to keep up with the formation of new groups and the ongoing training requirements of existing groups. Sixty three new WSHGs were given two days initial training and the Secretary and Treasurer of each group received specialist training for their respective roles. In total 976 women took part in this training.

Forty seven existing WSHGs received ongoing training and a total of 648 women took part. This training concentrates on legal and gender training led by an external expert trainer. This training is proving very popular and enabling as women are told about their legal rights as opposed to traditional practices, especially in terms of inheritance. Groups also were trained in nutrition awareness which is a central plank of SCAD's efforts to improve the general health level in the villages. Practical training is given with recipes and cooking techniques using low cost local vegetables and kitchen gardens are promoted.

As a result of the Trustee visit to SCAD in January a new programme was agreed for adolescent group work for girls prior to marriage. So far 7 courses have been held involving 108 young women. Initial results are very encouraging. There are reports that young women are finding it very helpful to be able to share their feelings and aspirations with their peers and the SCAD tutors and the information they are given is proving useful to them. A number of young women have decided on significant changes in their life such as going on to higher education. The programme also includes valuable information on health and hygiene issues.



Above: WSHG training programme.  
Right: Inspecting one of the planted trees

## Gypsy Primary School

A much needed renovation and improvement has taken place to the washing and toilet facilities. A new larger water tank has been installed, existing toilets have been upgraded, extra toilets provided and washing facilities have been much improved. This outlay was agreed during a visit by the Trustees in January.

In addition to the state school syllabus the children are given extra curricular experiences. External field visits are now being organised to go to local museums and a visit to the Post Office took place to learn about the services available there. A special outing was organised to take the children (which include the children of the nearby SCAD colony for people with leprosy) to Kanyakamuri, the southern most tip of India. This is a holy place where people come for a pilgrimage but it is also a fun tourist place as well. These activities are not provided at state run primary schools and are very useful in broadening the knowledge and understanding of the gypsy children.

Several young women having finished at the primary school have enrolled in secondary education. This is still an unusual occurrence in this community and SCAD continues to encourage the parents to let their children further their education.

## Tree Planting



So far this year 30,000 trees have been planted and a further 60,000 are planned when the monsoon rains come. Conditions this year have not been favourable for good tree growth and survival with lack of water and extreme heat being the biggest problems. A number of existing trees have died and the cultivation of new trees has been particularly difficult. The outputs of the SCAD tree nurseries has been affected and SCAD will be forced to buy in some 30,000 trees in the near future to plant after the monsoon rains. However, with a timely and good monsoon, much of the ground lost will be able to be caught up and the SCAD specialist staff and the selected and trained tree beneficiaries are poised to spring into action once the rains come.

# from SCAD

## Water Generation

SCAD staff have been very busy during the summer renovating and improving village ooranies ( local reservoirs ) and constructing rainwater harvesting tanks on primary school roofs. With 90% of rain falling in the approx 8 week winter monsoon period water is always an issue in the poor rural villages. Whenever possible SCAD, with our help, de-silt and deepen existing ooranies thus enabling more water to be stored for the long dry hot season which lasts until October. In addition to the water usage of the villagers water is lost to evaporation and seepage. The water that seeps away through the banks and the bottom of the ooranie is not entirely lost as SCAD have found that positioning bore wells inside or very close to the ooranies can capture a lot of this water. What happens is that, under the ground, the fresh water from the seeping ooranie sits on top of the heavier saline infected ground water and does not mix with it. This top band of fresh water can then be pumped from a bore well providing the pipe is not set too deep.

It is a time consuming and, in Tamil Nadu terms, expensive to renovate and improve an ooranie. Villagers give their labour as a contribution to the project but the majority of the considerable amount of earth moving that is required is done by mechanisation. Six ooranies were worked on this summer and, with the inclusion of concrete sluice gates, there is not much change out of £5,000 each. However over 900 families will benefit enormously from the work and, with a decent monsoon, they have every hopes that the ooranies will not dry out next summer.

Six more school rainwater harvesting tanks were constructed which will mean that over 400 primary school children will have safe drinking water whilst at school. This facility will not only improve their health and well being but it is also an incentive to go to school.



Above: Excavation for a new ooranie.  
Bottom right: A group of elders

## Elders Programme

Significant changes have taken place this year to the Elders programme. The scheme has not changed much in the last ten years and with a constantly increasing demand SCAD decided to try and improve the quality of the scheme and, at the same time, tighten up the entry process. A senior SCAD executive has been placed in overall charge and a number of new innovations have been introduced.

Many of the elders have some form of vitamin deficiency and to combat this a SCAD women's self help group is making up large quantities of a nutritional health mix which is distributed to the elders when attending their monthly day camps. The first of a series of programmes has been held concerning the rights of older people and laws that concern them. The programme, attended by over 50 elders, was led by a local magistrate and a legal service representative who not only gave information but also offered to give practical help if required.



The monthly day camp that every elder attends has been strengthened by the attendance of a nutritionist, a counsellor, a health worker and exercise and cultural experts. This is in addition to a Doctor and local SCAD field workers. These changes will undoubtedly improve the lot of these previously abandoned and destitute older people and we are proud to have helped to initiate this programme to which we have always contributed.

# A visit to SCAD

Kim Roberts and her 16 year old daughter Tessa visited SCAD this summer. Kim, a long time supporter, had wanted to visit the project for sometime and here are her impressions.



“ This summer my 16-year old daughter and I had the privilege of spending a week at SCAD. We had been enthusiastic about SCAD for many years and were looking forward to seeing its work at first hand.

By the end of our stay, I was utterly inspired by what has been achieved during the last 25 years and by the warmth and generosity of everyone we met.

It's hard to know what to focus on in a short article because there is simply too much to convey, but I think if I have to pick one thing that stood out for me it would be the tree planting.”

The tree planting scheme seems to me to embody the three core strands of SCAD's vision – supporting education and work opportunities to create future life chances; implementing welfare measures to improve the immediate quality of life; and addressing environmental issues for long-term sustainability.

When we pulled off the main road to the port of Tuticorin to see the SCAD model farm we were told 'this is our agricultural campus', we gazed out at the dry scrubland which stretches as far as the eye could see and found it hard to imagine what this 'agriculture' could entail. Further down the track, we discovered that tree planting has transformed the barren landscape into a green oasis. From here, farmers and villagers learn how to care for young trees and when the rainy season comes, drought-resistant saplings are rushed from the tree nursery to the villages for planting. These trees have been specially selected for their resistance to drought and also to provide food, fodder and an income supplement for families in the form of a cash crop such as neem, a natural insecticide.

The benefits of tree planting on quality of life became evident as soon as we visited the salt pans and were deeply sobered by the thought of working in the searing temperatures, with the heat radiating off the harsh white crystals, day in day out. Amazingly, even in this salty environment, the salt pan villages were a haven of dappled shade, providing welcome respite for the families who spend their lives in this harshest of landscapes.

And of course tree planting has enormous environmental benefits. The main SCAD campus near Cheranmahadevi lies at the foot of the rocky Western Ghats. Over a decade ago, hundreds of SCAD staff, volunteers, students and villagers scattered seeds on the lower slopes just before the rainy season; 'greening' the hill-sides in this way has reduced heat radiation, leading to a drop of 4°C in the annual mean temperature on the plain below.



Standing in the abundant woodland that now covers these lower slopes, I started to understand why I find SCAD so inspiring – it's about practical solutions, the power of people working together and long-term vision.

Kim Roberts

*If you are envious of Kim and Tessa's visit to SCAD and their memorable experiences, or if a visit to Southern India on your 'things to do' list, SOTE's second 14 day tour now makes it possible. Please look at the back page >*

# A new environmental project at SCAD



Photograph by David Friese-Greene

Visitors to the SCAD campus outside Cheranmahadevi now have yet another innovation to see and learn about. Situated alongside the new organic garden is a large biogas plant and a smaller pyrolyser unit. The project has been conceived and funded direct with SCAD by James Brugges, a long time supporter of SCAD and this charity, and managed by David Friese-Greene.

The idea is to process local agricultural waste to provide cooking gas and electricity for use on the campus and to mix the waste slurry

from the process with charcoal from the pyrolyser unit to provide a fertiliser and soil conditioner for local farmers.

The pilot project, which opened in March, serves SCAD's 5,000 campus students, so it is bigger than appropriate for villages. It has two parts. An anaerobic biogas plant is run on green waste from the college kitchen and local markets. It produces gas (for cooking) and electricity, as well as providing slurry to be mixed into and permeate the charcoal (or biochar). The pyrolyser is run on dry agricultural waste and prosopis (an invasive bush on the surrounding scrubland) and is driven by a thermal-electric generator strapped to its side. Waste materials and labour are the only inputs for both parts. Field trials using biochar fertiliser are being carried out in the adjacent organic farm to gain

experience of best practice for local soils, crops and biochar mix.

There is good interest from local farmers to use the biochar fertiliser to replace increasingly more expensive and less effective chemical fertilisers. The charcoal itself is not beneficial to soil but the microscopic cavities in the charcoal retain moisture and provides refuge for microbes and other insects that benefit plant growth. The technique is in its infancy but there are good indications that substantial savings of water can be achieved, crop yields increased and expenditure reduced. There are environmental benefits of carbon being buried which are long lasting thus reducing the need for frequent applications. There are great hopes that this technique will have lasting benefit to the farming communities that SCAD serve and beyond.

## Visit SCAD in January 2013



This 14 day tour, suitable for adults of all ages, is an opportunity for our supporters, their family and friends, to see first-hand the great work SCAD is achieving with your generous donations ... and take in some of the spectacular sights of Southern India, with the services of an experienced tour guide.

The Indian journey begins at Trivandrum where there will be a restful day at a hotel near the beach getting acclimatised. The next day we travel into Tamil Nadu and to the SCAD campus at Cheranmahadevi which will be the base for the next seven days. The time here will be spent visiting SCAD's many projects, plus taking in some of the local places of interest. The second leg of the tour takes us over the famously scenic Western Ghats and into Kerala, with a tranquil backwaters cruise, discover the charms of Kerala and relax before finally saying goodbye to India.

This is the second tour, lead again by Eddie Gaylard, an experienced overseas tour guide who has run his own tour company. He is an active SOTE supporter who is volunteering his services.

The likely dates of the tour are from 5th to 19th January 2013 and the full itinerary will be published in February 2012. However, with a maximum of 20 places available, we strongly suggest that anyone who thinks they might like to go to register their interest to [info@salt-of-the-earth.org.uk](mailto:info@salt-of-the-earth.org.uk). We will operate on a first come first served basis.

\* There will be no charge as such but tour members are asked to make a donation of at least £650 for the experience.

Double occupancy rooms will be provided as will transport and meals whilst at SCAD.

Tour members are responsible for organising their own flights. Advice on booking flights is on offer. Return flights are typically £515 (2011 prices) and visa expenses are around £60.

## The political challenge in India to reduce poverty

The national government's Planning Commission in India is in the process of formulating the next five year plan which, when implemented, will have enormous implications for the rural poor. In advance of this report the Human Development Report, issued in October, which will have an impact on the final plan of the Commission, makes grim reading.

The report reveals that the poor in rural India were better fed 30 years ago despite an average growth in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of over 6% in recent years. The rural calorie and protein intake has fallen by 8% to 2,020 calories per person per day as against a recommended nutritional norm of a minimum of 2400 calories. It also reported that nearly half of children under the age of five were malnourished during the period 2000 -7. These figures are the worst in South Asia and worse than the worst performer in the African region.

India's Supreme Court has asked the Commission to update its poverty line figures to reflect rising prices. The Commission's response has been to set the rural poverty line figure at Rs 26 per person per day (35 pence). This figure has been widely criticised as being far too low and there is hope that this figure can be increased. The current official inflation rate is nearly 10% and food inflation is over 12%.

The figure that is finally arrived at to determine the official poverty line is critical. If a family is below the poverty line it is entitled to significant subsidies for grain, pulses and kerosene for cooking. Clearly the lower the poverty line figure, the lower the amount of government money which has to be spent. On these figures 37% of India's 1.2 billion people currently live below the poverty line but one estimate suggests that the true figure could be as high as 77%.

Health is another area where India performs very poorly. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has found that governmental spending on health in India is so low that it comes 182 out of 191 in a world league table of countries. India spends considerably less per head than neighbours Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (which is considered one of the poorest countries in the world). There are only 9 hospital beds per 10,000 people in India compared with 30 in China.

Critics also point to a World Bank report in May which said attempts by the Indian government to combat poverty were not working. It said that aid programmes were beset by corruption, bad administration and under payments.

To make serious progress on rural poverty the government must address the problem of agriculture. At least 60% of the population (over 700 million people) rely on agriculture for their



living but this sector of the economy only accounts for 14% of GDP. A massive investment in infrastructure and a comprehensive modernisation programme is required but there is little enthusiasm for this among the urban political and business elite.

India Today, a large and well respected current affairs weekly, said the following in their issue of 7th October.

*"Countries like South Korea and Taiwan eradicated poverty in a single generation. It requires economic growth. India has achieved that. It also requires people to have proper, productive jobs. That in turn requires investment in human capital, education and skills. A largely uneducated population living off farming is never going to escape poverty. But nobody is outraged by this reality. No one, either in Government or in the quasi-Government has put their political weight behind long term solutions to poverty."*

The problem is huge and it is not getting better. Will the government decide to address the poverty issue in a serious and fundamental way? Past history would suggest not which will mean that organisations like SCAD are going to be needed for a considerable time if living conditions are not to be eroded further.

SALT OF THE EARTH Registered Charity 328328

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